

Fixar-Malte

YSI - Sweden - Country case 1

1. The service

Many Swedish municipalities offer a janitorial service or minor home help service known as Fixar-Malte, which is available to all residents over a certain age and to residents with disabilities. The name of the service is based on a combination of the Swedish word for “fixer” and the name Malte, the first janitor to work with the service. A Fixar-Malte provides help with simple tasks around the home that can be dangerous for elderly or disabled people to do by themselves. The tasks include replacing light bulbs in lamps, hanging up curtains, fetching things from basements or attics, hanging paintings on walls, rearranging furniture etc. The tasks should not require craftsman skills in e.g. electricity, heating, and ventilation, and must not overlap with services provided by home care or private household services; such as cleaning or washing clothes. The Fixar-Malte also does security checks of users’ homes, focusing on fire safety and fall-reducing measures. Usually, there is a time-limit of 30-60 minutes for the service (Höganäs, 2017).

The service is provided by the municipalities but can be organised in various ways. The services can be carried out by one or several employees in the municipality, by persons involved in daily activity programmes or work programmes, by community rescue services such as firefighters or by companies hired by the municipality to offer these services. Depending on the municipality, a small surcharge is taken for this service, although in most municipalities the service is free of charge. Usually, the resident must provide any necessary material for the tasks to be completed (Vinnova, 2013).

To access the Fixar-Malte service, the resident must reside permanently in the municipality, making summer residents ineligible. Eligibility is also determined by age criteria, which differs between municipalities. Some have set specific age-limits ranging between 65-75 years, whilst others define users as “retired” or “elderly”. The Fixar-Malte service is considered a privilege for residents rather than an individual right (Höganäs, 2017), though a municipal decision to offer the services can be appealed by legality examination in accordance with the Swedish Local Government Act (Socialstyrelsen, 2006).

The Fixar-Malte service was initiated in 2000 by the municipality of Höganäs. A majority of Swedish municipalities started offering these janitorial services between 2005 and 2008 (Vinnova, 2013). New legislation on the authority of municipalities was introduced in 2006, which gave municipalities the opportunity to offer minor services to elderly over 67 without first evaluating their needs (lag 2009:47 om vissa kommunala befogenheter). It remains unclear whether this might have facilitated the introduction of janitorial services such as Fixar-Malte, since minor home help services are offered in municipalities which choose not to apply the legislation as well (Socialstyrelsen, 2007). Nevertheless, the spread of the project indicates a general appreciation by residents and municipalities for the services provided by a Fixar-Malte.

Thirteen years after the first Fixar-Malte was introduced, 191 out of a total of 290 municipalities in Sweden offered some form of janitorial services to their residents (Vinnova, 2013). The minor home help services have also been noted in both local and national media.

The municipal commissioner of Höganäs introduced the Fixar-Malte service after learning of the high municipal costs for rehabilitation of injuries from falling accidents. As such, the explicit aim of the service was initially to prevent injuries caused by falling in domestic environments amongst elderly and reduce rehabilitation costs. In addition, a goal of the service became to enable elderly and disabled residents to continue living in their own homes as well as offer social support and alleviate loneliness, which is common among the elderly living in single households. From the outset, the service was concerned with social well-being, and the Fixar-Malte was encouraged to stay and talk with the residents by the municipal commissioner (DN, 2004). Finally depending on the structure of the service in individual municipalities, and those employed to perform the tasks, the service can provide meaningful work for people taking part in activity or work programmes (Vinnova, 2013).

According to Per-Erik Persson, who is currently employed as the sole Fixar-Malte in Höganäs municipality, an important part of the service is to help elderly residents feel less lonely and vulnerable. The residents know they have someone to call when they need help, but some residents also call on his services primarily to have a chat over coffee. Per-Erik does around 40–45 home visits per week, which is equivalent to around 2080–2340 visits per year. Usually, people call for the services once every two weeks, though some people call more often. Sometimes, people call in just to have a chat over the phone. Per-Erik stresses the social aspect of the job and views it as equally, if not more, important than the actual janitorial service. He also points out the benefit of having less time-pressure than regular home care service personnel: Per-Erik can take time to sit down for a cup of coffee with the residents after helping them with a task. The janitorial services are very popular, both among single households and elderly who live in shared households. Sometimes, residents need to wait up to two weeks for some services, like lawn-mowing, because demand is high. General knowledge about the service is high, partly due to active marketing measures on behalf of the municipality, such as advertisement in local newspapers, and partly because Per-Erik himself does some marketing, by, e.g. visiting cafés for the elderly (Äldrecafé). Per-Erik also stresses the importance of the services being free of charge and believes the demand would drop significantly if a fee was introduced.

2. Impact

The impacts of the Fixar-Malte service are in some regards difficult to measure with certainty, due to a lack of research on the project in recent years. A nationwide study of the service was conducted in 2013 by Vinnova, Sweden's innovation agency. The study included a survey to all municipalities and a theoretical model of the socio-economic costs of fall injuries and the benefits of janitorial services, based on previous research and accessible health registers. The aim of the study was to outline the janitorial services provided Swedish municipalities and to examine the societal gains, costs and consequences of these services (Vinnova, 2013). While

these findings may not be completely current, we believe the data and conclusions from the report to still be of interest and relevance.

In the 2013 study, Vinnova constructed a socioeconomic model for the analysis of costs and consequences of fall injuries. The model included both direct costs during the first year after an accident and outcomes such as reduced quality of life after a fall injury. A calculation was made and applied to a theoretical municipality of 50 000 residents. The model showed that even if the reduction in fall injuries due to the services of a Fixar-Malte is small, the costs saved are equivalent to an average budget of janitorial services with one person employed. This is, nevertheless, a theoretical example, and the report also notes that calculations using real data need to be performed (Vinnova, 2013).

One of the most commonly noted gains in the 2013 study is fall prevention. This concurs with an evaluation made in Höganäs in 2004, three years after the service had been introduced, which showed that fall injuries amongst elderly had decreased by 50 percent and that rehabilitation costs had been cut by SEK 7 to 8 million per year (DN, 2004). According to the municipal commissioner of Höganäs, the Fixar-Malte service is very popular and has reduced rehabilitation costs in the municipality significantly (Vinnova, 2013). Another noted gain is the possibility for elderly to remain in their own homes for a longer period of time. Municipalities in the survey also note that people outside the regular labour market have been given a meaningful occupation. Economic restraints and low demand are the most common reasons for not offering minor home help services. Minor home help services were offered by voluntary organizations in 20 of the 99 municipalities which did not provide janitorial services in 2013 (Vinnova, 2013).

While the Fixar-Malte service is largely regarded as successful, and is offered by a large majority of Swedish municipalities, it should also be noted that certain conditions and restrictions, mostly related to geography, resources, and demand, may determine whether a municipality has the potential to offer the service. In terms of geographical restrictions, the service is difficult to provide in large municipalities with few residents, where it is not cost-effective to drive long distances between residents. In some regions where demand is low, neighbouring municipalities have organised a joint janitorial service. (Vinnova, 2013). Most municipalities offer the services free of charge, or with the condition that the resident provide the materials needed for the task. While it does not lie within the scope of this study to conclude whether the use of the service is affected by it being free of charge, the Vinnova study stresses this feature as an important aspect of the service. Nevertheless, some participating municipalities also point out the need for a fee to avoid misuse (Vinnova, 2013). Surveyed municipalities also remarked that a platform for national coordination of janitorial services and exchange of ideas and evaluations could be useful, considering the scope of minor home help services. The introduction of such a platform could provide an arena^[LF1] to carry out common evaluations of minor home help services, thereby creating a better foundation for further research. Vinnova suggests that The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (Sveriges kommuner och landsting) could be responsible for setting up such a platform (Vinnova, 2013).

Overall, the Fixar-Malte service seems to be both popular and has been successful in reaching its goals. Besides the humanitarian aspect of preventing fall injuries, which cause suffering and a

decreased quality of life, and possibly death, there is also a financial aspect in that fall injuries are costly and require a great deal of medical resources. Consequently, fall-reducing measures are of significant importance. Apart from reducing fall injuries, the Fixar-Malte janitorial services create spillover effects, such as preventing a decreased quality of life and increased social support for elderly and disabled residents. It can therefore be concluded that minor home help services is money well spent, from both from a humanitarian, societal and municipal perspective. Apart from potential cost reduction, an increased feeling of security among residents, satisfied users and meaningful activities are gains that justify the cost and resources invested in janitorial services (Vinnova, 2013).

3. Sources

3.1 Persons interviewed

Per-Erik Persson, employed as Fixar-Malte in Höganäs municipality, interviewed 2017-10-06 and 2017-10-11

3.2 Written sources

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